

Decoration Day Band Concert

Before my own brother died
I liked Decoration Day
We'd visit with clippers
and rakes relatives that stretched
across Clallam County.

While my father clipped old sod
my mother tidied headstones.
I'd run with seldom seen
cousins across grandmothers
and long dead uncles,

Between blood-strong peonies
and snowballs in mason jars,
and read familiar names
like songs from a tone-deaf time
I thought I could hear.

The best place was the grey stone
that was my soldier uncle,
my father's favorite I
never knew. We always brought
a flag to put there.

Having nobody dead here,
I bring my son instead
of lilacs to play in this
graveyard; trombones slide at right
angles with the flag.

His blue uniform loops me cold
in shining braid and gold
overlay. He plays something
military to celebrate
an old, old way of dying.

-- Joan E. Stone

Issaquah, Washington

INDEX: VOLUMES 7 - 9, INCLUSIVE (1967 - 1969).....

Note: Index to vol. 1-3 found in issue 12: pp. 36-39; index
to vol. 4-6 found in issue 24: pp. 36-38

Key: Author/issue number: pages

¶ A -- Anderson, Jack/25: 7; Anonymous/36: cover (adapted fm.
Book of Durrow); Arone, Phyllis Onstott/31: 10-11;

¶ B --
Banker, Lynne/34: 22-23; Bassett, Barbara/31: 33-34; Baxter,
E. R./25: 24-25; Bell, Harry/30: 22-23, 25-29; Berge, Carol/

34: 2-4; Blazek, Douglas/29: 6-8; 33: 30-32; Blei, Norbert/27-8: 15-16, 29-30; 31: 9, 28; Bond, Harold/31: 2-3; Book, M. K. (Malone, M.H.)/29: 10-12; 30: 32; Boyajian, Aram/30: 10-12; Brecht, Bertolt/26: 14 (transl.); Bremser, Bonnie/34: 8; Brissman, Barry G./36: 3-4; Bukowski, Charles/29: 21-23; 30: 30-31; 31: 34-35; 33: 13-14; Bullock, Michael/26: 28-29; Burne-Jones, Edward/35: cover; Burroughs, William S./36: 19-26 (Academy 23);

¶ C -- Caudle, Wilma/34: 15; Chaban, Ruth/25: 28-29; Cherry, Neeli/27-8: 37; 35: 28-32; Chute, Robert M./33: 26-27; Cooperman, Stanley/25: 2-3; Coy, Kathleen/34: 30-33; Crews, Judson/27-8: 35-36; 31: 31-32; 33: 26; Crow, Douglas L./32: 30;

¶ D -- Dell, William C./29: 25; Depew, Wally/32: cover, 34; DeVoe, Nina/26: 32; diPrima, Diane/34: 19; Dobel, Ken/33: 12-13; Domin, Hilde/36: 27 (transl.); Dransfield, Michael/25: 10-11; Enright, John/30: 7-10;

¶ F -- Faber, Robert/34: 24-25; Fantl, Susan/34: 16-18; Fife, Darlene/27-8: 17; Finlay, Sue/36: 13-14; Fox, Hugh/30: 35; 32: 7-29 (The Headless Centaurs); Franks, Barbara/34: 13-15; Fraser, David/32: 31;

¶ G -- Garcia, Barbara/34: 27; Georgakas, Dan/36: 6; Gildner, Gary/36: 9-10; Ginsberg, Louis/25: 35; Glen, Emilie/27-8: 39-40; Grass, Günter/30: 29-30 (transl.); Gray, Don/26: 15-22 (In the Outside Silence of Things); 35: 27; Grimes, Martha (Holland, Martha G.)/36: 30-31;

¶ H, I -- Haddo, Oliver (Puechner, Ray)/27-8: 19-26 (Maestro Insana Goes West); Hargrove, Chris/33: 28; Harris, David W./25: 23-24; Harris, Marguerite/34: 9-10; Head, Robert/27-8: 17-18; Hearst, James/31: 12; Hebron, C. C./31: 25-27; Heglin, Jeff/36: 28-29; Heil, Tiki/34: 30; Heise, Hans-Jürgen/26: 14 (transl.); Higgins, Dick/25: 15-22 (Intermedia); Hoffman, Jill/34: 25-26; Holland, Barbara/34: 20-21; Holland, Martha G./36: 30-31;

¶ J, K -- Johnson, Sydney/34: 16; K., K./34: 11; Kelly, Dave/25: 31-32; Kempher, Ruth Moon/26: 31-32; 33: 32; Kenison, Gloria/26: 23-26 (Once More -- An Encore); 27-8: 14; 31: 14; Koertge, Ronald B./29: 13-20 (Bird Man of Long Beach); 35: 15-26 (Ties That Bind); Kover, Vicki/34: 26; Kreutz, Irving/31: 6-8; Kryss, T. L./25: 6;

¶ L -- Laufman, Dudley/26: 8-9; Lazarow, Victor/33: 4-12; Leary, Robert Jr./25: 27-28; Levy, D. A./32: 32-33; Lifshin, Lyn/25: 12-13; 31: 12-14; 34: 4-5; Locklin, Gerald/27-8: 3-7; 31: 15-22 (Star Trek & Such); 33: 33-35; 35: 5-7; Lurie, Toby/27-8: 8-13; Madden, David/29: 2-3; Malone, Gayla Christa/26: 35; 30: 13 (drawing); Malone, M. H. (Book, M. K.)/27-8: 1; 33: 15-22 (intro.); Mariah, Paul/35: 9-10; Matthews, William/25: 8-10; 30: 33-34;

¶ Mc -- McFadden, David/29: 3-6; 36: 31-32; McKnight, Sellis/36: 10-11; McLeod, J./26: 29; Mehrotra, Arvind K./

25: 14; Menebroker, Ann./35: 34-37; Miller, Brown/26: 9-10; Montgomery, George/26: 35; 34: guest editor, 1; Moore, Robert Nelson, Jr./25: 32-33; Moraff, Barbara/34: 27; Morris, Tina/34: 33-35;

¶ O, P -- Ochester, Edwin/31: 1-2; O'Connelly, Barb/26: 10; 33: cover, 23; O'Connor, Patricia Hamilton/35: 32-34; O'Neil, Jim/31: 23-25; Onopa, Robert/25: 33; 32: 5-6; Osterlund, Steve/36: 8; Owens, Rochelle/34: 5-7; Penfold, Gerda/35: 1-3; Perchik, Simon/26: 27-28; 29: 1-2; Perkins, Michael/26: 30; Perret, Christopher/30: 13-23 (Geranium), 33 (drawing); Peters, Robert/29: 9-10; Petersen, Arne Herlöv/26: 13 (transl.); Pinsker, Stanford/30: 34-35; Piontek, Heinz/26: 14 (transl.); Pleasants, Ben/26: 7; 33: 1-4; 35: 3-5; Plymell, Charles/33: 29-30; Peuchner, Ray (see Haddo, Oliver);

¶ Q, R -- Quick, Kathryn/31: 32; Ramp, Philip/33: 23-25; Randall, Margaret/34: 28-30; Riccio, Ottone M./27-8: 33-34; 36: 29-30; Richmond, Steve/35: 11-12; Rieder, Rolla/36: 6-7; Riffenburgh, Robert H./31: 29-30; Roseliep, Raymond/25: 11-12; Russell, Norman H./31: 3-6; 36: 7-8;

¶ S -- Saunders, Virginia/27-8: 31-32; Sawyer, Philip/26: 3-5; Schram, Irene/25: 34-35; Shaw, Charles/27-8: cover, 38-39; 30: 6-7; 32: 6; Skinner, Knute/31: 27; 36: 32-33; Slaughter, William R./27-8: 18; Starr, Elizabeth/35: 28; Stepanchev, Stephen/36: 12-13; Sterry, Craig/35: 13-14; Stone, Joan E./36: 35-36; Storm, Hester G./35: 37-38; Sullivan, Mary/34: 9; Sypher, A. (Malone, M. H.)/25: cover; 26: cover; 27-8: 19 (collage); 29: cover; 30: cover; 31: cover; 32: 7 (art); 34: cover;

¶ T -- Taylor, Alexander/26: 12-14; 30: 29-30; 36: 27; Theis, Adeline/26: 14; 30: 29-30; 36: 27; Tidler, Charles/25: 4-5; Tifft, Ellen/25: 1; 27-8: 7; 30: 5-6; Tipton, David/36: 4-5; Tipton, James/36: 33-35; Tropp, Gloria/34: 7-8; Trudell, Dennis/27-8: 27-28; 30: 1-5; 36: 1-3;

¶ U, V, W -- VanHouten, Lois/34: 21-22; Ventadour, Fanny/27-8: 34-35; Wade, John Stevens/26: 5-7; Wagner, D. r./25: 26-27; 29: 23-25; 32: 1-3; Waldman, Anne/34: 11-13; Wantling, William/25: 29-31; 36: 15-18 (Five Poems); Weidman, Phil/26: 2-3; 27-8: 28; 33: 15-22 (Two by Eight Equals 6Teen); 35: 12; Wheatcroft, John/33: 27-28; Wild, Peter/26: 1; 27-8: 1-2; 32: 3-4; 33: 14 (Wormwood Award: 1967); Winski, Claudia/26: 33-35; Wolven, Fred/27-8: 37-38; Wyatt, Charles/26: 30-31;

¶ X, Y, Z -- Zimmerman, Eleanor B./35: 8-9.

New Magazines:.....
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